USABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

What is Usability?

Means that your web pages are easy to understand and easy to use.

Elements are found in predictable places, with predictable results when you click them.

Organization of the links and information is logical and designed so you can easily find what you need, or get help when you aren't able to.

Content is well written and organized ... clearly and concisely.

The user does not have to do an inordinate amount of scrolling or clicking to access the information he is looking for.

Future: Usability will extend to other devices, other than web browsers, including cellphones and PDAs, and probably other devices we haven't invented yet.

If design is done well from the outset, your website will be able to achieve usability on all these points, without significant time and money involved in redesign.

What is Accessibility?

It means that anyone can use your website.

It doesn't matter what browser version they are using, or what brand of browser.

It doesn't matter whether their physical abilities are perfect or not.

Some of the disabilities that you need to consider and some of the ways that your users are accessing your websites.

Hard of hearing/ deaf users

Neurological difficulties resulting in motor impairment

Cognitive difficulties

Blindness/ low vision

Color blindness

Bottom line: It becomes the USER'S choice of how to view your material. Places the content as more important than the presentation.

How do we do this?

Different techniques … all too technical for me to discuss with you.

But the approach is this:

- You build websites not with proprietary tools that work only a few browser platforms.

- You build instead to accepted W3C standards, and stay up to date with those standards. – Building standards-based websites is very important. Current browsers, and most older browsers, easily manage code that is written to strict standards. It keeps your websites accessible to all.
(World Wide Web Consortium)

- You build the accessibility in at the beginning, incorporating it into daily planning and work. Don't wait and try to retrofit.

- Use the DMD Guidelines, which are on the website.

- Plug for DMD: Lots of experts who can help out your designers and coders.

Why? Why should we do this?

- **Legal**. 508 and 191. Our laws require that any website has to be as accessible to a disabled user as to any other user. There is no compliance body, doing "gotcha" testing. You have to self-police.

Again… if you build your websites with accessibility in mind from the beginning, this is really a non issue.   If, however, you choose to ignore these standards you are really flying in the face of the law. Any user who was unable to use your online application, for example, would be in a position to sue your agency.

- **Marketing / Return on Investment.** Legal issues aside. Why would you spend the time and effort to build a website that not everyone could use? Why would you want to have a website that only certain users of a certain browser

can look at? Did you ever see a browser warning "This website looks best viewed with Internet Explorer version 5.1" on an e-commerce site? Can you figure out why? Because you're shutting people out. You're excluding people. You're limiting their access, and you're designing for yourself and not the public.

- **It's the right thing to do.** Designing accessible websites is not hard. It is not excessively time consuming …. unless you consider good, solid, standards-based code to be "not worth the time." And if you do it, and do it right, you'll have material that everyone can use. Isn't that what you're after? You don't want to alienate your audience. If anything, your agency would like for you to GAIN audience.

MYTHS

We've already tackled a couple of the common myths:

- **Accessible design is difficult to do.** Wrong. It is actually an aid to building standards-compliant, clean-loading, and quick loading web pages that anyone can look at.

- **Disabled people don't use the web.** Wrong. In fact, for some disabled people, the web has been a liberating influence. When a person who has mobility issues is able to transact business from his home, without having to find transportation and pay for it, I believe we all benefit. With assistive technology, many many more people are becoming better able to use the web.

That means we have to be mindful of their needs and not exclude them by using careless design.

Here's another one:

- **Accessible design is dull and boring.** Wrong. Just because you have lots of users with lots of abilities to all degrees, does not mean that your pages have to be text-only. That's the old fashioned way to design an accessible website, and it's really the wrong way, because then you have TWO websites to maintain and you've just doubled your work!

In fact, accessible design can still be attractive. You can still use images… there are ways to tag them so that you can communicate their content to your low-vision or blind users.

- **Good assistive technology solves all accessibility problems.** Wrong. Good page design written to strict standards has to be the foundation for

accessibility. In fact, even the best assistive technology... technology such as screen magnifiers, screen readers, or keyboard based browsing must have standards-based web pages to work optimally, or at all.

- **Web accessibility only helps the disabled.** What if your mouse goes out on you? can you still navigate a web page using your keyboard? what if you break an arm or otherwise temporarily lose the use of a finger, hand, or your eyesight? Accessible design can help elderly web users ... one of the fastest growing market segments. Sometimes, web pages time out too fast. Accessible design keeps timeouts within parameters that help all users, not just the disabled.

Have you ever used closed caption TV, or seen it used in a noisy restaurant or bar setting? Was closed caption developed for people in noisy bars? Yet, people who have perfect hearing are USING closed caption TV on a regular basis. This is the same philosophy behind universal accessible design.

More than half of Web sites run by disability organizations are failing to pass accessibility tests, according to a survey--meaning they cannot be used by some of the very people that they aim to support.

Last week, leading ecommerce Web sites were marked out by the U.K's independent Disabled Rights Commission for failing accessibility tests. However, many members of the online community may well be more surprised by the findings of the Disability 50 survey conducted by communications consultancy Ethical Media.

Ethical Media tested 50 leading disability Web sites against the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) set out by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). The guidelines were established to ensure that people with disabilities, such as those with visual impairments, would still be able to access the Internet.

While such organizations are meant to follow the same rules as the majority of e-commerce sites, it could be argued they have a greater moral obligation to comply with these standards. Yet 58 per cent failed to achieve the W3C's compulsory compliance level, the Ethical Media study found.

http://news.com.com/2100-1038_3-5195666.html?tag=nefd.top

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